

# NATURE REGIMES IN SOUTHERN MEXICO: A HISTORY OF POWER AND ENVIRONMENT'



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This article explores the popularized history of a state-peasant conservation alliance in southern Mexico. Following poststructural calls, it treats this history as a locally constructed "regime of nature," a story that condenses and attempts to direct the intersection of history, cultural mediation, and ecology. Using ethnographic and archival material, it examines what factors made capitalist interventions aimed at exploiting local forests possible. It compares former regimes with structures and discourses linked to conservation to comment on the relationship between protected areas and state formation. Through this exploration, I suggest compatibilities between poststructural and political-economy approaches to political ecology. (Calakmul Biosphere Reserve, *ejido*, violence, globalization, migration, frontier colonization)

Research on agricultural frontiers emphasizes national policies that frame colonization as well as the local economies and ecologies shaping peasant land use. At Calakmul, located near Guatemala and Belize on Mexico's Yucatan peninsula, these concerns coincide with a popularized local history.' In both cases, a series of capitalist interventions opens the way for colonization and farmers' engagement with local forests. While the novelty of today's human-environment interactions increasingly receives scrutiny (Fairhead and Leach 1996), new settlement areas challenge assessments of local history. These sites commonly present scant textual documentation. Often, a "frontier" designation provides a blank slate on which academics, conservationists, colonists, and state agents alike shape a region in various images. Within this shaping, researchers now question the way depictions of wilderness accompany frontier designations and influence social relations as much as they presume certain human-environment interactions (Alonso 1995; Li 1999). Where there are protected areas, such as Calakmul, a historical gloss and wilderness beliefs aid a potent push to naturalize new governing practices and undermine environmental ideas and actions that counter state intentions.

Following poststructural calls, this article explores Calakmul's popularized history as a locally constructed "regime of nature," a story that condenses and attempts to direct the intersection of history, cultural mediation, and ecology (Escobar 1999). Escobar (1999:4) encourages researchers to consider "the manifold practices through which the biophysical has been incorporated into history—more accurately, in which the biophysical and the historical are implicated with each other." Transforming this point into a question, what made certain resource regimes in Calakmul both thinkable and politically possible at different times?

Distinct from Escobar, I consider localized depictions of nature regimes and focus on a version of Calakmul's history generated when this area became home to the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve, Mexico's largest tropical protected area. In 1995,

I recorded this history as related by peasant or campesino leaders and state agents, including the Reserve Director and his staff. These people described Calakmul as a place that, after decades of a forest-based economy, became home to peasants who failed to value forest ecologies. Frontier families established settlements by battling an inhospitable ecology, exploitation by timber companies, and government neglect. Calakmul's people were infuriated by the Reserve's 1989 declaration, as these policies reneged on state promises for land distribution. Tensions subsided in the 1990s when Mexico's ruling PRI party (the Institutional Revolutionary Party) used conservation-development aid to buy out campesino opposition. By 1996, the conquest of Calakmul's people and environment neared completion as Reserve staff and campesino leaders promoted the creation of a new municipio or county comprised of the Reserve and adjacent lands. Calakmul would be heralded as Mexico's "first ecological municipio" (*Diario de Yucatan* 1996).

While this example supported notions that protected areas incorporate undercapitalized areas into larger economic structures (Escobar 1996), Calakmul's official history raised questions about what antecedents make such work possible. One question entailed what technologies and political arrangements made possible Calakmul's various economies, especially in light of Calakmul's ecology. As state agents assumed the mantle of former forest regimes, past power was presented as a simple fact. This point contrasted with campesino depictions of an aggressive local ecology that undermined farming. Numerous settlements in Calakmul are located on soils that provide infrasubsistence harvests. These include sites whose harvests, under the best of circumstances, are only three-fourths the state average (INEGI 1994). Also, Calakmul's seasonal forests experience drought every four to five years (Folan 1992). With no permanent streams or rivers, people rely on rainwater. Prior to the 1990s, the prospect of water and food scarcity haunted Calakmul's residents. Living conditions were so difficult that migrants who endured this period commonly describe those who left as "people who did not know how to suffer." Currently, 23,000 people live in Calakmul (INEGI 2001b). At least that number likely came and went from the area between the early 1960s, when farm settlements were first founded, and the 1990s, when state programs, including decisive work in water distribution, facilitated long-term settlement. Given the way campesinos describe an antagonistic ecological setting, how was permanent colonization possible?

In 2001, I returned to Calakmul with a team of researchers to assess the settlement histories of ten villages, including two private property communities and eight *ejidos*.<sup>1</sup> The communities included ecologically diverse sites established at different points in Calakmul's history. In each place, the team documented community archives and records of ejidal assembly decisions dating to the late 1970s. These records provided topics for questions directed to long-term residents. Both formal and informal interviews took into account how ethnicity frames information flows in Calakmul. The team included local interviewers whose identities as Yucatec Maya, Choi Maya, and Mestizo reflected Calakmul's population. (Mestizos in Calakmul are mainly migrants from Mexico's states of Veracruz and Tabasco.)

This material revealed a different social and environmental history, one that showed colonization was made possible through multiple kinds of state practices, always linked to foreign capital. During the 1990s, both state and campesino agents renegotiated their relationship by introducing contradictions in environmental definitions, construction of campesino identities, and demarcation of state practices. These contradictions were furthermore incommensurate with experiences of the same issues in Calakmul's multifaceted campesino community. In describing first the official history and then additional material, this essay uses the official history's political economy approach to question its intentions. Countering Calakmul's "master trope" is an imperative exercise in the larger task of imagining and making possible alternative socioecological futures at Calakmul and places like it.<sup>2</sup> The conclusions return to this task in the context of poststructural and political-economy approaches to political ecology.

#### AN OFFICIAL ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY

In 1995, staff with the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve and the Regional Council, a campesino organization, introduced academics and development agents to the area by relating its history. The Council collaborated with the Reserve to implement a far-reaching conservation-development program, which attracted attention for its size and organization. To many observers, the Council seemed like a community-based environmental movement. Thousands of families participated in programs that included wildlife management, environmental education, agroforestry, reforestation, and ecotourism (Acopa and Boege 1998).

The Council's peasant leaders and university-trained extensionists oversaw these programs as well as newcomers' initiation into the area. Staff described Calakmul as a frontier, nearly forgotten by Mexico's government until the advent of Calakmul's Reserve. Although Calakmul was home to pre-Columbian cities, staff claimed the region was depopulated until the 1920s. At that time, Calakmul's trees provided U.S. markets the essential ingredient in chewing gum, chicle. Chicle tappers opened Calakmul's forests by establishing seasonal camps. In the 1940s, chicle's boom abruptly ended with the invention of a synthetic substitute, and timber companies began to dominate Calakmul's economy. Logging continued into the 1980s, however, and beginning in the 1960s, land-hungry farmers began moving to Calakmul and challenging the timber companies' pre-eminence. Working ejidal lands carved out of logging concessions, campesinos sold wood to the timber companies. These companies, peasants complained, underpaid for their product and undercut campesino attempts to gain an advantageous position in the timber economy.

The Regional Council grew out of earlier campesino unions, one of whose organizers described the decades-long battle against timber companies. In the early 1970s, campesinos formed the Union of Forested Ejidos which, in the 1980s, reorganized under the name, Union of Maya People. The change reflected fluctuating support for the movement among campesinos, who were pressured by timber

companies to dissociate from both groups. The companies, for example, exploited insecurities about land tenure by offering to survey ejidal boundaries for those communities who renounced Union membership. The timber companies labeled Union organizers "communists," and in the early 1980s, military authorities aided the companies' intimidation campaign by threatening a principal campesino activist. Although oral accounts presented campesinos as isolated underdogs, the Union was involved with national peasant groups (Harvey 1998a), a point which appears key to their survival. Through national connections, the group cultivated sympathetic federal agents and laid the foundation for an alliance between the Reserve and Regional Council.

Council staff and former Union leaders described this connection as based on a scientific study of deforestation in Calakmul. In the early 1980s, Union leaders delivered a copy of this study to people close to President de la Madrid, including his successor, Salinas de Gortari. The report supposedly found that, at sustained rates of logging, Calakmul would be without a standing forest by 1995. Indeed, by the late 1980s, Calakmul's sawmills were forced to cease operation. Rather than a denuded landscape, the companies left a forest too young and trees too narrow to support their ventures. Oral accounts do not describe federal actions to counter this damage. Such actions were taken later, in part as a capitulation to international pressures (O'Neill 1996). Instead, the report was invoked after the Biosphere Reserve's declaration, as campesinos and federal agents built a relationship around new environmental ideas.

Finding common ground on conservation became imperative following the antagonisms of the Reserve's first years. Campesino leaders argued that the Reserve's 1989 declaration came as a surprise to people who, by an accident of cartography, found their ejidos located inside a protected area. Campesinos in general were enraged at plans to relocate as many as 44 communities with land claims inside the Reserve (Klepeis, In press). State agents reportedly feared an uprising like that carried out in 1994 by the Zapatista army in Chiapas (Collier 1994). Although the Zapatista action took place five years after the Reserve's declaration, in the events' retelling, the guerilla movement had parallels in Calakmul. The Zapatistas and Calakmul's people commonly asserted that government neglect forced them into enduring poverty and rebellious political opposition.

The Reserve became a rallying point for frustrated farmers, and subsequently a rallying point for a renegotiated campesino-government relationship. Relocation plans were dropped, while PRI *officials* promised to increase financial aid if Calakmul's voters supported Salinas's gubernatorial candidate. Calakmul's people delivered votes for the PRI, and aid monies, mainly from federal agencies but also from foreign donors, began to pour into the Reserve and the Union of Maya People. The latter was renamed the Regional Council, a move likely intended to embrace a multiethnic campesino constituency. By 1995, the Reserve and Council's alliance made the institutions virtually indistinguishable. In their hybrid form, the two were the most powerful government entity in the region.

Despite these successes, Council directors admitted they struggled to connect conservation with local environmental ideologies. The Council's campesino directors posed as arbiters of Calakmul's ecological future, all the while asserting that poverty forced Calakmul's people into the unsustainable slash-and-burn farming upon which most area families subsisted. More than half of Calakmul's 72 communities participated in Council programs. Yet Council staffers felt forced to emphasize the programs' development aspects because participants were ambivalent about conservation (Haenn 1999). In relating this history, Council and Reserve staff inevitably invoked this tension to appeal for state and international funds. With increased resources, the Reserve and Council's programs would foster a new forest economy that would address problems of poverty by demonstrating (sometimes creating) forests' economic value.

This history—especially its three-part structure built around chicle, timber, and farming—became Calakmul's official history as academic researchers and environmentalists solidified an oral account in writing (Boege 1995; Ericson, Freudenberger, and Boege 1999; Haenn 2000; Stedman-Edwards 1997). In replicating the history, authors reproduced and left unresolved a series of conflicts generated by the history's political context. Calakmul's official history conveyed a tone of inevitability to the state's dominance. Once again, Mexico's powerful state machinery used pork barrel to buy out political opposition (see Molinar Horcasitas and Weldon 1994). Conservationist accountings, however, resisted applying such inevitability to deforestation. The connection between state practices and deforestation remained opaque, obscuring the state's possible role in deforestation trends.

Instead, the state appeared as an absentee landlord, newly motivated by campesino poverty and environmental degradation. This notion of environmental degradation was an important innovation. Calakmul's ecology, formerly an aggressive opponent in campesinos' working lives, became a fragile entity in need of protection from those same campesinos. The new environmental definition made possible a new disciplinary regime in Calakmul based on a changed campesino subjectivity. Peasants, once considered defenders of area forests, were now stubborn culprits in today's deforestation.

The strategic essentializations in Calakmul's official history may be contradictory, in part because the history condenses people's fears and hopes about impending associations. With the Biosphere Reserve at the center of campesino-state relations, Council and Reserve staff had to conceptualize a physical environment capable of sustaining relations whose outcome was as yet unknown. Like campesino-government relations, local environmental depictions held multiple tensions. One of these depictions, characteristic of protected-area models, is the notion that a healthy environment is one devoid of people (Chaloupka and Cawley 1993). Calakmul's forests appear newly threatened because people now live there. In the following sections, I argue that Calakmul was not depopulated and make some suggestions as to the source of this inaccuracy. People have long lived in Calakmul, but only the area's recent inhabitants pressed for direct ties with the state.

## CALAKMUL INTO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Calakmul's forests supposedly entered the twentieth century in a depopulated, pristine condition, yet census figures from the late 1800s reported 8,000 to 15,000 people living along what is now the Reserve's eastern border (Dumond 1997a; Martínez Alomia 1991; Sapper 1990). This compares to a 1995 population of approximately 15,000 in the same area (Boege 1995). Increasing population throughout the southern Yucatan peninsula may make earlier estimates appear sparse. Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to suggest Calakmul had no residents. Who were these people, and why do they receive little recognition in official histories?

In 1900, Calakmul housed a handful of agricultural communities, clustered around the sites of Ixkanha and Icaiche, whose residents spoke Yucatec Maya (hereafter Maya). In 2001, a descendent of these people recalled how, in the 1920s, his grandparents walked from northern Guatemala to the town of Ixkanha (see also Antowchiw 1994). Popularly, these people have been forgotten, although the autonomous Indian kingdom to their south has been well documented (Jones 1999). For reasons given below, few descendants of these communities now reside in Calakmul. Those who remain live in Xkanha, which, because of ethnic and road connections; orients toward Mayan neighbors to its north rather than the frontier settlements to its south. An added reason for omitting these people from state-sponsored histories may be the opposition they posed to state rule. As descendants of successful militants in a war against Spanish-speaking elites, Calakmul's Mayan inhabitants embodied the limits of state power.

During the mid-1800s, the northern Yucatan peninsula experienced a Caste War in which Mayans fought, and nearly triumphed over, forces led by Spanish-speaking elites. While historians depict an exploitative plantation economy as the war's impetus (Dumond 1997b; Reed 1964), the war's name connotes popular understandings of the conflict. Mayan people aimed to overthrow an oppressive status quo built on ethnic difference. Dumond (1997b) argues that these efforts ended in a stalemate. By the late 1850s, Spanish-speaking combatants and their Maya supporters were confined to the peninsula's northwest. Subsequently, Mayans in these areas became slaves to area plantations (see below). Rebel Maya retreated south, including the area now bordering Calakmul's Biosphere Reserve. In the south, rebels established independent governments and were prominent actors in battles over forest resources and national territories.

Rebel sovereignty endured as late as the 1930s. Territorial sovereignty accompanied a new cultural dominion as rebels invented a new religion (Dumond 1997b; Sullivan 1989) and took part in peninsular reorganization of ethnic identities (Hervik 1999). Although continued warfare cut migratory and trade routes between the northern and southern peninsula, this separation did not entail isolation. Instead, southerners shifted their attention to what is now Belize, where British colonists supplied rebels weapons and contracted to log forests under Maya control. Until the early twentieth century, each of these groups—rebel Maya, Mexican state agents, and

British colonists—worked to ward off the other parties' territorial claims.' Maya profited not only from forests but also their position as linchpins in regionalized struggles.

This geopolitical scene changed around 1900, when the British and Mexican governments signed a border treaty. Independent Maya then lost their source of weapons around the time logging and chicle companies were mounting effective operations in Mayan forests (Dumond 1997b; see Alonso 1995 for a comparable end to Apache autonomy via changing U.S.-Mexico relations). In the early 1900s, rebels on the peninsula's Caribbean coast came under Mexican military occupation (Sullivan 1989). In Calakmul, the people of Ixkanha and Icaiche had made an earlier peace with Mexican authorities, who in turn promoted a gradual, bureaucratic conquest (Dumond 1997b). This strategy resurfaced in the 1990s, when authorities similarly planned to extend government administration into rebellious campesino communities. In the case of the Maya, authorities equivocated in putting this plan into effect. Dumond (1997b:118) describes how, in 1885, the people of Ixkanha built a school in anticipation of a promised teacher who was never commissioned. Campeche state authorities, who would have overseen this bureaucratic conquest, were likely hampered by their sense of a state in demographic crisis.

Around 1900, officials in Campeche, always one of Mexico's least populated states, were in disarray over the state's few inhabitants. The Caste War had halved the state's residents to 89,000 (Martínez Alomia 1991). Plantation owners complained that there were too few workers to staff haciendas. For a time, plantation owners successfully lobbied for state-sponsored immigration schemes to recruit migrants from the Canary Islands and U.S. Chinese communities (Sierra 1991; this tactic was also used to minimize organized, ethnic-based resistance; see Joseph 1998). Campeche pundits fretted about a lack of local industry, outmigration by the state's youth, and the state's failure to produce an educated professional class. One group even lobbied to have Campeche declared a federal territory to bolster the state's financial base. Opponents of this proposition countered that the state had a sufficient population. The problem lay in population dispersion, including the 8,000 to 15,000 rebel Maya in territory outside state control. This faction argued for a "self-colonization" (Sierra 1991:310) to utilize the state's "rich natural products" (Martínez Alomia 1991:207). These plans had few direct results in Calakmul but presage support for the chicle industry, which would attract those seeking direction from powerful outsiders while resolving questions of finance and territorial control.

With little tangible state opposition to their authority, clues to how Mayans disappeared from Calakmul's popular memory reside in more detailed accounts of the chicle industry. Research on coastal rebel communities points in this direction. In 1918, a rebel general accepted a chicle concession from Mexican authorities, leading one researcher to conclude: "Chicle . . . vanquished Maya resistance, not only because it integrated Mayans into . . . chicle exploitation, but also because it provoked internal divisions among Mayan leaders, who saw possibilities for quick enrichment" (Ponce Jiménez 1990:26).<sup>6</sup> At Calakmul, oral accounts that describe

tappers as arriving in unoccupied land overlook possible usurpation of Mayan claims. Newspapers from 1936 show that the Icaiche still received rents from foreign logging companies, and Mexican officials of the day visited Icaiche as dignitaries visiting a foreign country (Anonymous 1995). Yet, also in 1936, newspapers report that the Icaiche willingly left their homes to escape the "wicked exploitation" of chicle contractors. The group joined a government resettlement site (Anonymous 1995). After resettlement, the Icaiche site became a central shipping point for chicle.

#### CALAKMUL AND CHICLE COLONIALISM

Calakmul's popularized history depicts chicle and timber extraction as two discrete periods, but people living in the area since the mid-century report the continuous coexistence of chicle tapping, logging, and farming. Published accounts further describe how chicle's boom was financed by U.S. companies who since the late 1800s had held timber concessions in Campeche (Ponce Jimenez 1990). These perspectives of blended regimes suggest that the difference between the industries lies not in their product but other salient issues. Chicle and timber extraction shared certain work practices but diverged in the way they connected Calakmul to global structures. The two industries also had different relations with state officials while operating under distinct philosophies of worker relations. These philosophies may have affected distinct forms of worker resistance and reappropriation of market structures. In 2001, the norms and relationships established by the chicle and timber industries were well within living memory of Calakmul's residents. Thus, this section begins to delineate the cultural models and social structures which migrants encountered in Calakmul.

Beginning in the 1910s, Mexico's forests geared up to supply U.S. citizens the raw ingredient in a new fad, chewing gum. Mexico was the world's largest producer of chicle, and Campeche was Mexico's most productive state (Konrad 1991). Following the check on British colonial intentions, chicle reconnected Calakmul's forest and people with global structures and oriented this link to the United States. Commonly believed to relieve tension, chewing gum was included in the rations of WWI soldiers. The U.S. Department of Defense retained a role in chicle exploitation through the Second World War, when it became the world's largest purchaser of the resin (Ponce Jimenez 1990:5-9). Just as WWII brought chicle production to all-time highs, war-related research saw the development of a synthetic substitute for chicle. By 1947, Campeche and Calakmul's chicle-based economy came to an end.

During the 30 years prior to 1947, Campeche was essentially a colony of U.S. gum manufacturers. As much as 95 per cent of Mexico's chicle harvests were bought by U.S. companies. These same companies (William Wrigley, Jr.; Leaf Gum Co. of Chicago; Desmond and Co. of New York) held chicle concessions and financed Mexican contractors to carry out harvests. Throughout the southern peninsula, chicle companies amassed vast land holdings. In 1940, a single U.S. company controlled more than 1,140,000 acres of Campeche forest, an area two-thirds the size of the

Calakmul Biosphere Reserve (1,787,000 acres; Mansour 1995). The industry's influence was formidable. In 1940, taxes from chicle tapping contributed 63 per cent of Campeche state revenues (Ponce Jimenez 1990:36).

Not surprisingly, in her assessment of the industry, Ponce Jimenez (1990) describes negligible state intervention in chicle operations before the mid-1930s. At that time, changed federal policies went into place. In 1930, Mexico's President Ortiz Rubio declared chicle a public resource and mandated the creation of co-operatives that would implement extraction "under the protection and guidance of the federal government" (Ponce Jimenez 1990:25). U.S. companies named themselves managers of the new co-operatives, and little changed. In the following decade, however, a more powerful federal administration, under President Lazaro Cardenas, strengthened the co-operatives. Cardenas linked these changes to the expropriation of U.S. concessions. As part of a national land-reform initiative, concessions were assigned to tappers' co-operatives (Ponce Jimenez 1990:30). Some of these concessions would later form the core of the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve. Nonetheless, these reforms were necessarily limited, as U.S. companies remained the product's only buyer.

Beginning with the chicle period, researchers have access to first-hand accounts of forest life in Calakmul. During peak years of production, 1939-40, as many as 20,000 *chicleros* (men who tapped chicle, along with the women who cooked for them) descended into Campeche's forests (Ponce Jimenez 1990:13). Although *chicleros* kept town residences, they spent as much as nine months of the year in forest camps. The chicle *centrales*, where *chicleros* built airplane landing strips, storage houses, and administrative offices, were more or less permanently occupied. Between forest and town, *chicleros* built a new society around a social hierarchy that was simultaneously rigid and volatile. They describe forest life as dangerously thrilling.

In documenting the life histories of elderly *chicleros*, Ponce Jimenez (1990) decries industry conditions but admits that tapping offered many people an improved standard of living. Chicle workers of the 1920s were mainly Mayans, experimenting with freedom from peninsular haciendas. An elderly woman recalled conditions on the estates: "When someone wanted to leave the estate . . . they had to ask permission. Sometimes, they gave you permission, but first they spit and, when you returned, if their saliva had already dried up, they gave you two whippings. . . . They chose our husbands for us, and if you didn't want to marry . . . they gave you 25 lashings and salted you as if you were a deer" (Ponce Jimenez 1990:41). On the plantations, future *chicleros* farmed corn and produced sisal rope. In return, workers received minimum food rations and two changes of clothes each year. Workers described conditions of permanent food scarcity, and those who found an abundance of game meat in Calakmul's forests would remember this, as well as the pleasure of travel, as chicle's main attractions (Ponce Jimenez 1990).

Although Mexico's revolution of 1910 legally ended slavery, the violent upheavals of northern Mexico did not occur on the peninsula, where hacienda regimes underwent slow alteration (Knight 1986). As one *chiclero* recalled, "People

heard there was a revolution and that people were free beginning around 1915.. . [but] nobody distributed lands. That was later with Don Lazaro [Cardenas, president in the 1930s]. They gave the [workers] their freedom, but the patrons didn't lose their estates. When campesinos gained their freedom, they went to work for whomever they liked. They went to cut chicle" (Ponce Jimenez 1990:39). Another respondent recalled chicle as the only available opportunity for people living where isolation, and, likely, a postwar recession (Knight 1986) inhibited agricultural markets: "I went to cut chicle because there wasn't any work. Some people had land but there wasn't anyone here to buy corn. The town's plaza was full of cattle, pigs, and chickens, but who was going to buy them?" (Ponce Jimenez 1990:44).

As campesinos traded isolated plantations for distant forests, many still worked for their former overseers. Plantation owners repackaged themselves as contractors to U.S. companies. A former contractor remembered, "Most of the hacienda owners ... became chicle contractors. They moved from the hacienda to chicle because that was how you earned money. Chicle was good business. I started without a cent and thank God it went well for me. I have a house, a ranch, I raised 4 children, and they all have a professional career" (Ponce Jimenez 1990:43). This story was offered by a Mestizo from Mexico's state of Tabasco. Similar advancement was unlikely for Mayans whose slave ties took on new shape in the form of debt peonage.

Chicle workers financed their jobs by borrowing from contractors whose inflated prices left most permanently in debt. Contractors deducted from chicleros' pay the cost of camp meals, tapping equipment, and support to a man's family while he was in the forest. Contractors used debt to cheat tappers, but tappers actively resisted this fraud. Chicleros in northern Guatemala recall the industry as rife with *engano* (deceit). People assumed everyone was cheating others out of money whenever possible (Schwartz 1990), sentiments later prevalent among Calakmul's campesinos.

Like oppressed people elsewhere (Tsing 1993), chicleros recast the industry's abuses and dangers into a source of pride. Malaria, venereal disease, and leishmaniasis (a mosquito-born disease akin to leprosy) were ever-present ailments in chicle camps. In the 1990s, former chicleros remembered most the threat of snake bites. With an air of bravado, one described how the only hope for a person bit by the venomous fer-de-lance required slicing the skin in a way that the rushing blood would carry the poison out of the body. Calakmul's chiclero families still keep in mind men who made pacts with forest spirits to increase their harvest, monkeys who fell in love with camp cooks, anteaters who dared men to test their strength in an arm-wrestling contest, and jaguars who, placing their paws in a man's own footsteps, silently followed chicleros through the forest. These mystical associations, however, operate as a subtext in Calakmul, where scientific ideas of the environment and its protection now dominate.

These hidden beliefs and resistances are even less accessible in historical records. In stressing the industry's exploitative labor relations, Ponce Jimenez (1990) provides little information on people's creative reactions to those conditions. Nonetheless, the

author's informants hint that chicleros were establishing a new social world by transforming gender relations and creating a new ethnic dynamic in Calakmul.

In the camps, chicleros created a multiethnic society, largely dominated by men. Although connection is not causality, the principles of ethnic and gender difference established in these sites, as well as their complex intersection, resonate with how these issues play out in Calakmul's current, more diverse migrant population. In particular, Mayans met men from the counties of Tuxpan and Balcanan in the states of Veracruz and Tabasco, respectively. Chicle collection in Mexico first began in these states. Experienced Tuxpenos and Balcananos, as they were called, taught their craft to Mayan recruits (Ponce Jimenez 1990:74). By the 1990s, when migrant points of departure had multiplied, county-based identities were replaced by state of origin. New migrants from Tuxpan and Balcanan would adopt and be ascribed the moniker of Veracruzano and Tabasqueno.

Like past municipio-based identities, state of origin operates as an ethnic marker in Calakmul (cf. Hirabayashi 1993). In choosing marriage partners, workmates, and in accepting newcomers to their ejidos, campesinos prefer *paisanos*, people from their home state. Campesino conversations on identity differences repeat earlier emphases on language, food, and most importantly, violent temperament. As a Maya chiclero recalled, "The Tuxpenos were really bad, all machete wielding. . . . Life in the forest was difficult, really tough. There was a time, around 1920, when we were completely cut off, and anyone who died stayed there. The law of the jungle ruled. Now, whenever there's a place with a lot of men and just one or two women, there are problems. But, a place without women is terrible" (Ponce Jimenez 1990:54). Below, I return to questions of violence in campesino colonization. A prominent point in this commentary is the way people built gender differences around notions of aggression.

Women, sometimes accompanying chiclero husbands, worked as cooks (paid by the contractors) and launderers (paid by chicleros). Socially, women also were assigned the impracticable task of reining in men's violent and sexual energies. The task was impracticable because male aggression was defined as innate. Nonetheless, the scarcity of women in the camps also contributed a limited authority to women who were astute or bold enough to commandeer sexual politics. A tapper described how some "men . . . signed on . . . according to who would be cooking in the camp. . . . The female element in the kitchen was basic. . . . To put it another way, a good cook controlled the chicleros" (Ponce Jimenez 1990:56). In campesino communities, any advantage to women's minority status would be lost, while men continued to hold women responsible for men's transgressions. Today, Calakmul is a place where many men take sexual conquest as their prerogative. Calakmul's police exemplify this prerogative's most extreme form. As the only people locally to have long-term job security, police officers self-consciously use their economic status to attract multiple wives and engage in additional dalliances. One officer explained that he has episodes in his life when he feels an uncontrollable need to be with women who are not his wife. A 25-year-old married officer blamed his affairs with thirteen-year-old girls on

the youngsters themselves because, in their naivete, they fail to halt his advances. Women's enduringly defensive position in these battles may have roots in chicle camps, where women were dependent on the same men who would harm them. The ambivalence arising from this contradiction is evident in the words of a former cook who notes, in quick succession, "The chicleros weren't crude, only if you started to play with them. Me? I entered my kitchen and if some son of a bitch came to screw me over (*chingar*), I grabbed my machete and I went after him" (Ponce Jimenez 1990:69-70).

Schwartz (1990) believes chiclero violent reputations were exaggerated and instead reflect industry working conditions. Although tappers operated under a camp captain, these men could not supervise people who worked scattered in the forest. Chicleros appeared unruly from the perspective of contractors who also used images of dangerous tappers to rationalize their abuses. Tappers, in turn, used their reputation to draw a line on overseers' power. Exaggerated or not, the chicle industry created an atmosphere of fear and violence linked to concrete acts (Ponce Jimenez 1990:60). This was possibly a transformation of the violence prevalent in former haciendas. Reprisals for specific breaches of authority may have been replaced by a setting in which all social groups held out the possibility of violence. The impunity of hacienda owners then became a more generalizable impunity. As late as the 1970s, a chiclero remembered that when he came across a skeleton in the forest, he fearfully hurried away and took no action.

Chicleros and their campesino successors were challenged to halt violence. Until the late 1990s, Calakmul lacked institutions capable of meting out anything other than vigilante justice. People expected the impact of such acts to be continued violence, if the victim or his or her supporters had the will to seek vengeance. Defining early-twentieth-century justice in his home state of Chiapas, an indigenous man described justice as "one's own strength (*la justicia entre ellos era la propia fuerza*). Justice was, if someone rubs me the wrong way, he dies right there." The man went on to describe cycles of violence that lie outside human control. Concurrent with Calakmul's nonindigenous residents, he believed an unnatural death poisons the place where the death occurred: "Evil takes hold in the earth, and, as they say, it has to look for food to sustain it. And, while evil reigns, it has to do bad (*tiene que hacer mal*). This is the beginning of vengeance." During Calakmul's chicle era, violence was framed by the industry's hierarchy and new concepts of agency arising from the demise of Yucatan's slave economy. Agricultural colonization appears to have intensified the use of violence in delineating local hierarchies while adding to its conceptual framework an agrarianism built on modified patron-client ties (see below). While violence was an intrachiclero and intracampesino phenomenon, reconsideration of the state's presence in Calakmul shows that state agents were complicit in these acts.

Comparing chiclero accounts with Calakmul's official history, one of the most marked differences is the former's depiction of an enduring state presence in Calakmul. The industry's dual foundation in the hacienda system and U.S.

imperialism attests to the way local chicle managers acted as an extension of government interests. Interviews with one of Calakmul's few remaining sawmill managers suggest this conclusion. He remembered his constant visits to state authorities in the Campeche capital. Timber companies collaborated with authorities on issues such as expanding state, as opposed to federal, land holdings in Calakmul. In the 1950s, timber managers housed and formed fictive kin ties with military officers on maneuver near Mexico's border with Guatemala. When chicle markets collapsed in the late 1940s, timber companies inherited the clout left by a weakened chicle industry. The two regimes continued to coexist in Calakmul and shared campsites, but their managers had no formal dealings. Chicle collection remained in the hands of the chiclero-managed co-operatives, while timber companies became the main arbiters connecting Campeche to U.S. markets. Chicleros fell outside the timber companies' discriminating social visions, such that even while the industries' low-skilled workers might blur their boundaries, the industries appeared distinct from elite perspectives.

#### AN INTERTWINED TIMBER AND FARMING ECONOMY

This section describes the management and public relations practices of Caobas Mexicanas, a company that dominated Calakmul from the 1940s to the end of the 1980s.<sup>8</sup> Calakmul's chicle and timber industries shared logistical features, such as a constellation of camps and reliance on air transportation. Caobas, however, succeeded in making itself, rather than logging, a pinnacle icon. Caobas was unique in the way it drew on paternalistic U.S. corporate practices and self-consciously established a new social dominion in Calakmul. In particular, Caobas built permanent towns. In its showcase town of Zoh Laguna, Caobas fashioned an atmosphere of grandeur overseen by a new middle class. Always dependent on U.S. markets, Caobas nonetheless effectively portrayed itself as an independent power. For the bottom-rung laborers on which the industry depended, this iconic status affected a relatively weak identity construction. Pronounced chiclero identities vis-a-vis tapping find little counterpart in logging. Where themes of violence indicated the internal challenge chicleros posed to their managers, challenges to the timber industry would come from without. As Calakmul's farm population grew, these new residents would use their identity as campesinos, a primary constituency for the Mexican state, to oppose Caobas.

No detailed history of Caobas exists, but visitors to Calakmul encounter the company's legacy in Zoh Laguna, a town of 1,000 people (INEGI 2001a). Today, Zoh Laguna serves as a base for nearly all academic research conducted on the region, research that overwhelmingly focuses on ecological topics. Zoh Laguna also houses the offices of the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve and Calakmul's four nongovernmental groups that take conservation development as their *raison d'etre*. In Zoh Laguna's conservation klatsch, newcomers learn of the town's former glory. In its heyday, Caobas sponsored a movie theater, baseball team, hospital, pharmacy,

school, and Catholic church in Zoh Laguna. The company delivered electricity and piped water to people's homes. Although people decry Caobas' exploitative practices (both social and environmental), one senses that today's environmental managers would adopt Caobas' stature if they could, and envy the company's ability to force environmental outcomes.

Those outcomes were billed as triumphs by Caobas' founder, Alfredo Medina. Medina's biography is comprised of both manager's reminiscences and a 1951 *Reader's Digest* feature, both of which suggest a man who deftly wove U.S.-style capitalism with the personality politics of Mexican patron-client ties. A resident of Yucatan state, the young Medina held an engineering degree from New York's Rensselaer Polytechnic and, with financing from his family's sisal plantation, founded a local construction company. In 1935, Mexico's President Cardenas nationalized the country's sisal estates, and Medina's company was in danger of collapsing. This failure reportedly forced him into timber concerns. In the *Digest* article, Medina responds to the crisis and moves through his career with the ease and foresight of an enlightened executive. He convinces skeptical bankers to finance his 2,100,000-acre logging concession in Yucatan state, courts U.S. furniture makers, forsakes upper-class dandyism by engaging in manual labor, and passes over the "vagabonds and fugitives" found in chicle camps to hire better-quality workers at elevated salaries (Benjamin 1951). By the time Medina began a new "conquest" in Zoh Laguna, he had opened corporate offices in Mexico City and signed on a U.S. forester to manage his operations (Benjamin 1951:24).

A manager for Caobas, Don Adolfo, remembered how this activism, as applied to Zoh Laguna, drew on policies of U.S. companies. In building a company town, Medina regulated everything from housing design (modeled after houses he saw in Texas) to farm animals. This approach would have been congruent with Medina's hacienda experience, and Medina's real innovation may have lain in the way he mapped the hacienda model onto a capitalist enterprise. Medina was also different in the extent of his national connections. In the late 1940s, these connections helped Medina recruit a group of Polish refugees from World War II then living in northern Mexico. As Zoh Laguna's original social core, these men provided an instant set of services as bakers, cobblers, and carpenters. The Polish contingent lasted only a few years. Don Adolfo remembered the men as "turned inside out by the war," and they left for other destinations. By the time of their departure, the Poles had carved Zoh Laguna out of surrounding forests, and Caobas was exporting mahogany and Spanish cedar to U.S. markets.

Demystifying Medina's personal claims, three factors hinted at thus far appear critical to Caobas' success: Medina's use of local hierarchical norms; technological innovations that allowed access to Campeche's forests; and Caobas's close ties with U.S. markets. I take each point in turn.

In addition to his national connections and roots in hacienda society, Medina was a native of Merida city in Yucatan state, a fact that impinged on his work in Campeche. First as a colonial-era political capital and later as the peninsula's

economic and cultural capital, Merida has long held the advantage in its historic rivalry with Campeche City. Medina's Campeche conquest, and comparisons between Calakmul's timber and chicle regimes, should be considered in light of Yucatan's assumption of privilege toward its southern neighbor. Medina largely recruited workers like Don Adolfo from his home state. Traveling constantly between the Campeche capital, Zoh Laguna, and Caobas' campsites, Don Adolfo earned the nickname "The Duke." The royal analogy was apt. Don Adolfo's reminiscences are catalogues of governors and powerful people with whom he closely identifies. His neighbors, who maintain close ties to Yucatan state, still consider themselves a kind of cultural establishment.

Technologically, Calakmul's conquest depended on motorized vehicles and construction of hundreds of kilometers of roads. Relative to other parts of southern Mexico, logging in Campeche was delayed by more than half a century. Logging in neighboring Chiapas and Tabasco states saw its augur in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when loggers used waterways to transport timber (de Vos 1996). Calakmul's lack of streams hindered timber harvesting until airplanes and automobiles allowed people to overcome this limitation. As director of Medina's construction company, Don Adolfo oversaw road work that included a 250-kilometer paved segment that still connects Calakmul to the nearest coastal port. While road construction was underway, Caobas relied on airplanes to transport all goods and materials. *Reader's Digest* described Zoh Laguna as "literally created out of thin air" (Benjamin 1951:124). According to Don Adolfo, U.S. companies facilitated this creation by paying for timber in diesel fuel.

Although none of Medina's companies was a subsidiary of a U.S. enterprise, Medina's connection to U.S. ventures could hardly be closer. His social and economic roots in Yucatecan haciendas linked him to Mexican financial structures dependent on U.S. capital since the late 1800s (Joseph 1998). Until the early 1960s, most timber leaving Zoh Laguna traveled to Jacksonville, Florida, via Cuba for use by the Dean Company. Throughout 1946-47, Dean posted two U.S. staffers to Zoh Laguna to ensure that the milled three-ply met the company's specifications. Dean representatives ceased their regular visits to Zoh Laguna in the early 1960s, but Caobas continued to host potential U.S. buyers.

Don Adolfo cites Medina's death in the early 1980s as the principal cause of the company's decline, but one wonders at the effects of changing ecological and political landscapes. Beginning in the 1960s, Caobas incorporated Calakmul's growing farm population into its work routines. Most of these people were Mayan, originally recruited to work in logging. Managers allowed farming on lands adjacent to mill towns, a scheme they likely found advantageous. Local food production aided an industry otherwise dependent on imports. Subsistence farmers also supplied a reserve of contingent workers, even following the creation of ejidos. The first wave of ejidal formation took place during the 1960s in mill towns, where Caobas continued its managerial role by appointing the ejidos' authorities. Ejidatarios occupying former camps also recall being pressured by state agrarian officers to sell timber to Caobas,



ostensibly to recoup the monies campesinos paid to process ejidal claims. Campesinos resented this arrangement, but wherever possible Caobas controlled tensions by backing ejidal strongmen or caciques. Caciques dominated the nominally democratic ejidos by monopolizing access to one of the few local sources of cash. Timber sales were so crucial to migrants' survival of periodic droughts that a campesino opponent of Caobas still insisted in 1995, "Timber is what maintains life here. You have to sell wood in order to plant crops, to keep on living."

Disputes between campesinos and Caobas were most acute in Zoh Laguna, and understandings of local history are shaded by the way Zoh Laguna acts as an entry for research. Zoh Laguna's peasants agitated for nationalization of farm lands and even the mill itself, a battle that only ended in 1996. Campesinos who led this struggle emphasize local rather than international connections in narratives that depict timber agents and campesinos in sharp contrast. In these accounts, campesinos appear unified in both their oppression and opposition to Caobas. At Calakmul, a campesino identity connects people otherwise divided around questions of gender, ethnicity, and time of arrival to the area. In 2001, our researchers further found that social structures framing migration positioned colonists differently in respect to one another, state agents, and local ecologies. Calakmul's popularized history condenses these differences into a generic notion of hardship. Our reconsideration suggests colonization was an uneven process, restricted by local environmental and economic conditions, but facilitated by social structures built on violence and exploitation of the area's newest arrivals.

#### DIVERSE STRANDS OF COLONIZATION

Calakmul authorities note that the municipio is home to people originating from 23 of Mexico's 32 states. As with other sites on Mexico's southern frontier (Arizpe, Paz, and Velazquez 1996; Collier 1994; Gates 1993), many of these people were directed to Calakmul by agrarian offices in their home states. Our team met few people who arrived at Calakmul in this way. Instead, we noted the prominence of three localized strands of colonization that fostered a more expansive migration. The first strand entailed the agriculturalists, noted above, who worked in mill towns. These families moved into logging and chicle camps, converting these sites into lasting settlements. The second strand consisted of Mayans from Campeche state, sent to the area by Campeche authorities. Arriving in the late 1960s and early 1970s, these migrants comprised a second wave of ejidal establishment initiated at the state (rather than federal) level. The third strand included a series of local caciques who, with state support, encouraged a colonization that bolstered their power and wealth. In this section, I focus on these latter two strands. Together, these structures opened the way for the vast majority of Calakmul's people who describe themselves as arriving on the advice of family and friends already living in the region.

Expansion of Mexico's agricultural frontier is often described as resulting from land pressures in the country's populous north (Arizpe, Paz, and Velazquez 1996;

Gates 1993), but Calakmul's colonization was initiated partly by agrarian issues internal to Campeche state (see Collier 1994 for comparable findings in Chiapas). Historically, Campeche's population has clustered along the Gulf of Mexico coast. There, towns house Mayan people, many of whom live in ancestral homes. In the early 1970s, these communities were stressed by economic stagnation and land scarcity. Some towns responded by applying to the state for an *ampliacion*, an extension to a town or ejido's existing lands. Resource-poor individuals solicited the lands as a group. Although such extensions belonged to the ejido as a whole, people listed on the petition were expected to occupy the new site. In 2001, we studied three Calakmul communities founded as ampliaciones to places located hundreds of miles away. During legalization, these extensions were reclassified as independent ejidos. Nonetheless, the original notion affected the commitment with which coastal migrants approached their new homes.'

The ejido of Eden (a pseudonym) typified these hesitant settlements that generally foundered on environmental constraints. Eden was occupied in the late 1960s by 24 men from the town of Calkini. While paperwork legalizing their situation was in process, Eden's new residents contracted a chiclero to guide them to their lands. The group included a network of brothers and cousins, many of whose wives remained in Calkini. These Calkini relations became the community's lifeline beginning in 1975, when Eden experienced a three-year drought. Town wives supported their families by selling hammocks and foodstuffs. As the drought continued, an increasing number of men abandoned the colonization effort. By the late 1970s, Calkini's economic situation was improved, and government work programs in town attracted all but one of the original settlers, Don Gerardo.

Although the three ampliaciones we considered all failed, their initiators reacted differently to this failure, spawning diverse trajectories thereafter. In an ampliación subsequently reduced to four of its original 227 colonists, the Mayans were approached by Tabasco ranchers who requested incorporation into the ejido. Fearing the newcomers would politically displace them, the Mayans strategized to create a multiethnic ejido, where no single state of origin would gain majority. Twenty-five years following these events, the Mayans retained influence as ejidal founders in a community housing 160 ejidatarios. Don Gerardo's situation contrasted in important ways. Eden's legalization was nearing completion just when the community had disbanded. Determined not to lose ten years of work, Don Gerardo's search for a solution grew urgent as an abandoned Eden caught the attention of land-hungry migrants. Don Gerardo was visited by men from Mexico's state of Zacatecas who offered to buy his land. Don Gerardo adopted a patriotic tone when he recalled replying that he could not sell land belonging to Campeche. The Zacatecas insisted, and on their third visit came armed with shotguns to press their point. Don Gerardo feared he would be killed whether he sold them the land or not, so he contrived for Eden's immediate recolonization. He invited nearby Choi Maya to relocate to Eden. Although Choi and Yucatec Maya are not mutually intelligible languages, Don Gerardo believed he could create bonds with this group based on a common

indigenous status. In the space of a month, the Choi families brought kin from their home state of Chiapas, and these newcomers dominated Eden's ejidal assembly. Any good will evaporated as Cholans resisted Don Gerardo's cacique postures, including his brokerage role with Caobas. In 2001, Gerardo resented deeply that his land battles had not translated into power within his ejido: "Those people arrived when the meal was already served. All they do is take advantage of it." In aspiring to be a cacique, however, Don Gerardo forsook violence, arguing that Mayans are distinct from Cholans in their peaceful ways: "Mayans lost the tradition of doing evil (*maldad*)."<sup>10</sup> Don Gerardo may have been unusual in this regard. Caciques often used violence and intimidation to shape their communities. In 2001, our team encountered three ejidos home to this legacy of cacique rule.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, various men (most commonly Mestizo) built personal fiefs in Calakmul by inviting family, friends, and acquaintances to settle former camps. Achieving a critical population mass was necessary to the ejidal grant process. These men, however, had no interest in the ejido's democratic aspects. The son of one of these caciques explained that his father first sought to convert a camp into his private ranch. Upon his application, agrarian authorities requested a bribe the family could not afford. The family then sought settlers whose names and financial help they used to request an ejidal grant. After an ejido's founding, these men overpowered their neighbors as they brokered the sale of ejidal timber (some had worked as camp managers for Caobas), charged entrance fees to newcomers, sold abandoned homes to new arrivals, and otherwise sought to transform their neighbors into some source of revenue. Taking a cue from the chicle industry, caciques might own stores in isolated areas. Some colonists thus depended on caciques for both access to consumer goods and the jobs to pay for such items.

As an expedient way to legalize settlements, the ejido also connected people to development aid and the power of state patron-client ties. Campesino activists in the 1990s condemned government inattention, but ejidal archives suggest officials had a focused presence in Calakmul. As early as 1975, campesinos received state credits for corn production. These funds appear so important that one ejido's rule book for the early to mid-1980s notes only loan amounts and beneficiaries. Ejidal archives also document the importance of agrarian-reform staff who implemented aid programs. Throughout the 1980s, and perhaps in the 1970s, agrarian reform offices were located in the de-facto political center of Zoh Laguna. In addition to financial aid, agrarian staff refereed ejidal disputes and certified migrants new to existing ejidos. Caciques, with explicit or implicit state approval, benefited disproportionately from state programs. For example, ejidal documents show that a 1985 community credit designated for ten beneficiaries was divided so that two men, the cacique and his son, received 82 per cent of the funds. As elsewhere in Mexico (DeWalt 1979; Lomnitz-Adler 1992; Sabloff 1981), state agents ruled through Calakmul's caciques. These men are still careful to mention their close ties to elected politicians and the PRI machinery. Although their fortunes vary, at a minimum they enjoy a security in food and land tenure not shared by their neighbors.

Caciques intimidated their neighbors into silence (cf. Parra Mora and Hernandez Diaz 1994), and people willing to recall their reign habitually found they had no words to describe it. Instead, they made a fist. Caciques often led coalitions of family and friends who tolerated financial excesses in return for a share in the spoils and protection from social volatility. In one case, we found that this structure could include measures of consensus and accountability to create a fairly harmonious community life. In the worst cases, caciques sponsored campaigns of terror. Rarely do these activities have documented evidence. In one community, however, people shared both their personal memories and a copy of court reports to describe life under a particularly violent cacique. This man's state ties consisted in spearheading the settlement's legalization through officials in Quintana Roo, Campeche's neighboring state that asserts land claims in Calakmul. Legalization was purportedly successful, but the cacique declined to produce papers evidencing this success. In the meantime, he continuously invited settlers to join his community, only to force them out once they had cleared valuable land or were about to harvest a plentiful crop. The court report shows that at one point he burned the homes of people who resisted their expulsion. In the late 1990s, Campeche state asserted its authority over this community. This change provided protection for witnesses who charged the cacique with a 1998 murder. In his court statement, the man confessed to committing seven additional homicides in the same community during the previous decade.

The 1990s saw caciques' power lessen for a few reasons: the timber industry's decline; an expanded road network that connected isolated communities; an increased police presence in Calakmul; and, not least, the Regional Council's conservation development agenda that directed programs to individual members and strengthened ejidal assemblies at caciques' expense.<sup>11</sup> This agenda led to today's municipio, an entity that allows state agents more direct access to ejidos (Haenn, In press). Interestingly, the municipio's creation was facilitated not by traditional power holders—timber barons and caciques—but campesinos, who demanded that the state aid their subsistence. Even more than an ecological crisis, Calakmul's Biosphere Reserve and conservation politicking responded to the crisis of a state and a constituency seeking altered forms of governance.

#### POLITICAL ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY

In 1995, the word "Calakmul" sat awkwardly on the tongues of Campechens who struggled to attach its imagined, unified campesino community to an imagined place, the Reserve, and later the municipio (cf. Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Area history shows both conservation's sharp divergence from past land-use ideologies (that emphasized unhindered exploitation) and its consonance with them (chicle and timber concessions, as well as connections to patron-client ties). Placed in this historical context, one sees how protected-area formation requires a response that reclaims history and considers a contradiction-laden legacy (Neumann 1998). As collaborations between governmental and nongovernmental groups, protected areas allow

intervention into sites where a single colonial or imperial structure (the state or a specific multinational industry) may not be feasible. In these contexts, environmentalism is often a foreign idea, repackaged locally in both hybrid (conservation-development) and incommensurate (conservation or development) forms. At Calakmul, campesinos may voice both these positions alongside an uncomplicated rejection of conservation methods (Haenn 1999).

Calakmul's official history shows the importance of historical appropriations to this process. That power holders depict history in a way convenient to their interests is certainly not a new phenomenon. Frontier designations often obscure enduring links between these sites and larger political economies (Muratorio 1991; Wilk 1991), the local reconfigurations of global forces (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992), and the social inequalities on which global forces often depend (Roseberry 1989). What is new at Calakmul is the way history-making acted as a bridge between past socioecological practices and hoped-for changes. The new campesino-government relationship, brokered by novel ideas of land management, required a "narratable explanation" (Brosius 1997). Narrative construction was hindered by campesinos' ambiguous attachment to Calakmul, both their enduring ties to their state of origin and their sense that Calakmul's ecology and political structures made for tough living. An even more difficult issue to address was the state's historic role in Calakmul. The official history asserts that, prior to the late 1980s, state authorities had no influence in Calakmul. This assertion gives voice to state anxieties concerning the shift from indirect to direct rule, while perhaps encoding recognition of earlier, Mayan autonomy. From campesino perspectives, however, the assertion is clearly false. Campesino willingness to adopt this position suggests that their new association with the state required a public forgetting of past misdeeds, especially state-tolerated violence.<sup>12</sup> By extension, this oversight obscured the way state-international alliances condoned violence to affect local people's marginalization and environmental mismanagement.

Generalizations, like Calakmul's official history, are an important tool in state practices (Dove 1999), and Gupta notes how attempts at conceptual homogenization often engender hybrid knowledge and identities (Gupta 1998). The Calakmul example reiterates how processes of change, fostered by contradictions between state rule and global organizations, are also fueled by people's creative reworking of these inconsistencies. As a regime of nature, the popularized history prevailed over challenges to state-campesino relations by attempting a new generalization: past insertions into state and market structures were somehow imperfect, focusing as they did on single environmental products. The new insertion would avoid that mistake by reconceptualizing human-environment relations along the lines of biodiversity and by providing multiple connections to state authorities (Haenn 2000). Both rhetorically and practically, this was a difficult transformation. Conservation ideals frustrated local political discourses centering on who benefited from forest resources, first by conceptually withdrawing forests as an object of use, and then by reintroducing forests into political contests under the auspices of conservation development.

This conceptual shift was bolstered briefly by novel government programs, the Regional Council's series of conservation-development projects, which ended by 1997. More recently, state-campesino connections via a diverse environment have been supplanted by campesino connections to a diversified state. The municipio currently attempts to co-ordinate the activities of no fewer than 29 state agencies in Calakmul, of which environmental agencies are only four. The municipio has replaced history as the platform on which state agents generalize about Calakmul's people and environment, while state and municipio authorities now work to shut down the Reserve and peasant organizations as centers of political agency.

Calakmul's reconsidered history provides an indicting account of how, during the last two centuries, people active in global economic structures allied with local elites to undertake radical environmental change. Discomfitingly, this point implicates not only today's international conservationists, but also foreign researchers, who similarly intensify global connections. While anthropologists reckon with this dilemma (Brosius 1999; Milton 1996), my momentary response has been to question the reproduction of the metanarratives that simplify communication in multicultural settings. My interest in doing so coincides with widely shared concerns that cultural diversity underpins multiple environmental strategies which, in turn, may be the key to working with unpredictable ecologies (Dove 1993). At the same time, intellectual conformity of the kind advanced by metanarratives hinders the imagination. Delineating the hegemonic discourses that shape both political power and its contestation (Roseberry 1996) is an important step in pinpointing obstacles to imagining sustainable futures.

Political ecology offers one framework for anthropological work in this delineation and reimagining. Currently distinguished between poststructural and political-economy approaches, researchers working in political ecology examine the intersection of environment and systems of power (see Escobar 1999; Grossman 1998; Stonich 1993; and Thomas-Slayter, Wangari, and Rocheleau 1996). Where poststructuralists might emphasize as obstacles to imagining alternative futures the construction of identity differences that link particular groups to particular environmental regimes, political-economy researchers might emphasize the obstacles of state and capitalist practices. The example of Calakmul shows how political ecology's dual strands are not necessarily contradictory. Campesino rejection of an identity defined as underdeveloped (Haenn n.d.) resulted in a local rendering of nature regimes that hinged on the area's political economy. At Calakmul, one notes the importance of a divided state whose actions often centered around competition among distinct sectors variously defined along ethnic and socioeconomic lines (cf. Rubin 1997). Perhaps most importantly, Calakmul shows that wherever political-economy concerns inform local constructions of nature regimes, such models must be subject to anthropological analysis rather than simply repeated in those assessments.

Temporarily removing those concerns from the Calakmul case, one faces a much more difficult situation. Despite their serious reservations, Calakmul's people work

to be part of the state. In their complaints about past state negligence, campesinos hint that a place without a state and without market opportunities is unacceptable to them.<sup>1</sup> In the case of Calakmul, such sentiments redirect academic concerns beyond critique to imagine and work toward a sustainability somehow consonant with existing political economies.

## NOTES

1. I thank the people of Calakmul, Richard Bilsborrow, Reyna Sayira Maas Rodriguez, Aurelian Gomez Gomez, Ventura Trejo Cruz, Rebeca Alvaro Lopez, Charles Wright, Mauro Sanvicente, and Sophie Calme for their assistance in the research and fieldwork for this article. Madelaine Adelman, Kristin Cahn von Seelen, Luis Melodelgado, and reviewers for *Ethnology* provided key ideas and sound editorial advice. Research in 2001 was supported through the National Science Foundation Grant BCS-1193739 and the Mellon Foundation. Research in 1995 was supported by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and the Fulbright program's U.S.-Mexico Commission for Educational and Cultural Exchange.
2. For research on frontier colonization see, for example, Harvey (1998b), Klepeis and Vance (n.d.), Murphy, Bilsborrow, and Pichon (1997), Pichon (1996), Santos-Granero and Barclay (1998), and Schmink and Wood (1992). The name "Calakmul" applies to both the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve and the *municipio* or county which houses the Reserve and adjacent lands. I use "Calakmul" to refer to the county and "*Reserve*" to refer to the protected area.
3. *Ejidos* are a kind of common property regime, where an assembly of ejidal members or *ejidatarios* hold vested rights in the communities' land. The legal framework for ejidos changed in 1991, thereby making possible ejidal privatization. These changes were not put into effect in Calakmul due to the area's extensive forests. See Wexler and Bray (1996) for modifications to ejidal restructuring in forested areas.
4. I thank Kristin Cahn von Seelen for this insight.
5. Rebel Maya were not a unified force, but divided between the Icaiche and Ixkanha groups, who signed treaties with Mexico, and the Santa Cruz group located on the Caribbean coast. Santa Cruz Maya posed a more entrenched opposition, and their descendants still do not identify as Mexicans (Sullivan 1989). Mexican and British antagonisms often included a proxy war fought through Maya groups, who nonetheless worked to maintain their independence.
6. All translations are my own.
7. Schwartz (2000) notes that Guatemala's chicle industry did not share Mexico's hacienda history. See Schwartz (2000) for an assessment of Petal colonization, as well as the distinct roles ethnicity and state violence played in this area adjacent to Calakmul.
8. Caobas was not the only company logging in Calakmul, but appears to have been the most influential. My interest in highlighting Caobas relates to the company's connections to conservation narratives and academic research.
9. I thank Reyna Sayira Maas Rodriguez, who came to this conclusion based on her interviews with pioneer Mayan colonists.
10. An additional three communities in our research, not founded by Mayan agriculturalists, had cacique figures prominent in their past or current political profiles.
11. This was not a stated goal, but the programs were modeled after community initiatives in neighboring Quintana Roo state, where popular participation required diminishing the influence of ejidal caciques (Hostettler 1996). Following the programs, patronage roles in Calakmul transformed into brokerage roles.
12. I thank Madelaine Adelman for this observation. This point connects to anthropological considerations of the silences structured into historical narratives. See, for example, Trouillot (1995).

13. It is worth noting that Mestizos, Mayans, and Choi differ in this assertion. Calakmul's Mayans use their shared ethnic heritage with other Campechens to bolster the influence of a group that is a small *percentage* of Calakmul's population. Mestizos are the municipio's main object of interest and thus its main collaborators. Calakmul's Chol, estimated between 25 and 40 per cent of the local population (Stedman-Edwards 1997), press for more influence in local state institutions. At present, these institutions respond to the overtures by declining audiences with the principal Chol organization and excluding the group from municipal meetings with local nongovernmental agencies.

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## FROM TRUE DOROBO TO MUKOGODO MAASAI: CONTESTED ETHNICITY IN KENYA'



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**Between 1925 and 1936, the Mukogodo of Kenya changed from Cushitic-speaking foragers to Maa-speaking pastoralists. This rapid transition took place in the midst of competing views of Mukogodo ethnic identity. To Maa-speakers, Mukogodo were low-status *il-torobo*. To British colonialists, Mukogodo were true Dorobo, victims of more powerful agricultural and pastoralist groups. Although British administrators fashioned a set of policies designed to protect Mukogodo from such groups, other British policies inadvertently contributed to the Mukogodo acquisition of Maasai subsistence patterns, language, and culture. Mukogodo themselves strategically used a Dorobo identity to manipulate the British while striving to lose the stigma of the *il-torobo* label and achieve acceptance among Maa-speakers as true Maasai. (Mukogodo, Dorobo, Torrobo, Maasai, Samburu, ethnicity, Kenya)**

Between the mid-1920s and mid-1930s, Mukogodo of Kenya underwent a rapid transition from being Cushitic-speaking hunters, gatherers, and beekeepers to being Maa-speaking pastoralists.<sup>2</sup> This transition is problematic in a number of ways. First, thanks to data on time allocation collected since the 1960s, it can no longer be assumed that a change from foraging to food production will improve a group's standard of living or reduce the workloads of its members (see Hames 1992 for a review). In the Mukogodo case specifically, there is no convincing evidence of an increase in standard of living since their acquisition of livestock (Cronk 1989b). Second, other hunter-gatherers in East Africa in superficially similar situations have remained hunter-gatherers despite contact with pastoralists (e.g., Hadza; see Kaare and Woodburn 1999), and Mukogodo themselves had had contact with pastoralists for centuries before the transition without themselves becoming pastoralists. Third, it cannot be taken for granted that even if a group does change its subsistence strategy it will also necessarily undergo the sort of wholesale cultural shift experienced by Mukogodo. Other groups in East Africa have made similar changes in subsistence while still keeping their own languages and other aspects of their own cultures (e.g., Okiek; Huntingford 1928, 1929, 1931, 1942, 1951, 1954, 1955; Blackburn 1976, 1982; Kratz 1981, 1994, 1999).

Elsewhere (Cronk 1989a, 1989b) I have analyzed the Mukogodo transition in behavioral ecological terms, suggesting that for individual Mukogodo men the adoption of pastoralism represented a response to a rapidly changing social environment in which they either obtained livestock or failed to marry. I have also examined some of the consequences of the Mukogodo transition to pastoralism, including their low position in a regional hierarchy of wealth and ethnic status (Cronk 1989c, 1990, 1991c). This article explores the change from a different but complementary angle, focusing more on the external factors that changed their social environment. An examination of the broader historical and political context reveals

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ETHNOLOGY vol. 41 no. 1, Winter 2002, pp. 27-49.

ETHNOLOGY, c/o Department of Anthropology, The University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh PA 15260 USA  
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